4: Horton E-4 (no date) 1948
SQ13 Mundurucu SQ13

THE MUNDURUCU[1]

By Donald Horton

TERRITORY AND NAME

101
[131]
[199]

The *Mundurucú* are a *Tupí*-speaking people in the southwestern portion of the State of Pará and the southeastern corner of the State of Amazonas, Brazil (map 1, *No. 1;* map 4; lat. 5°-8° S., long. 56°-60° W.). When first encountered by Europeans in the late 18th century, the *Mundurucú* were a warlike people, aggressively expanding their territory along the Tapajóz River and adjacent areas. Their expansion reached its limits at the beginning of the 19th century, when they were defeated by the Neo-Brazilians. Since then their territory has dwindled; remnant settlements are located on the Cururú and several of its tributaries (Abacaxis, Paracury, Apuciáua), in the municipios of Maués, Parintins, and Juruti, and on the Cururú River (a southeastern tributary of the Tapajóz). The principal settlements are located along the middle Tapajóz River and especially on its southeastern tributary, the Rio de Tropas (between lat. 6° and 7° S., and long. 56° and 57° W.). Communities formerly established on the lower Tapajóz between the Rio de Tropas and the Amazon have been absorbed or wiped out by Neo-Brazilian settlers.

Kruse (1934) distinguishes four regional groups of the *Mundurucú*. The Tapajóz River group, living on both sides of the Tapajóz between the Rio de Tropas and the Cururú River; the Madeira River *Mundurucú*, on the Secudury, a tributary of the Canumá; the Xingú River *Mundurucú*, known also as the *Curuaya*, on the uppermost left tributary of the Igarapé de Flecha, itself an eastern tributary of the middle Rio Curuá do Iriri; and the Jurueua River *Mundurucú*, known also as the *Njawbihwuy*. Nimuendajú (personal communication) regards the name "*Madeira Mundurucú*" as unsuitable, since the rivers on which this group is located do not flow into the Madeira; he also believes that the *Curuaya*,

[1] The writer is indebted to Dr. Curt Nimuendajú, who through personal knowledge of the *Mundurucú* and familiarity with literary sources not available to the writer, was able to provide additional information on the distribution and history of the tribe which has been utilized in the present account.

[125] Where the literature clearly indicates that a custom is no longer practiced, the past tense is employed; otherwise the account is given in the present tense even though it is probable that much of the culture as described no longer persists.

I: Tocantins--1 C-5 (1875) 1877 SQ13 Mundurucu SQ13

Studies on the Mundurucu Tribe: A Memoir Written and Read before the Brazilian Historical and Geographic Institute by Engineer Antonio Manoel Gonçalves Tocantins, Corresponding Fellow of the Institute.

I

Journey to the central Mundurucu villages, situated in the valley of the Upper Tapajos. -- Itinerary from Belém, capital of the province of Pará, to those villages. -- Scenes of savage life.

I left Belem on the eighteenth of June, 1875, bound for the Upper Tapajos.

The journey up the Amazon from Belém to Santarém and up the Tapajos from Santarém to Itaituba takes five days on one of the big steamers of the Companhia do Amazonas.

At Itaituba I embarked in a small canoe manned by eight Indians, nearly all of the Maué tribe, and proceeded through the falls of the Upper Tapajos.

Ten days later I reached the Mission of Bacabal, which was founded by order of the Imperial Government and established on the right bank of the Tapajos on the twenty-third of February [24] 1872.

Translator's Note:

Whenever possible, the spelling of Portuguese and aboriginal words -- including names of places, tribes, rivers, plants, native foods and implements -- has been changed to its modern Brazilian equivalent.

Portuguese personal names and trade names, book titles, aboriginal word lists and Mundurucu quotations have been left untouched, as have a few other native words of uncertain phonetic rendition and those that would require the use of letter combinations equally foreign to present-day Portuguese.

8: Murphy & Steward E-5 (1952-1953) 1956
SQ13 Mundurucu SQ13
Montagnais NH6

Mo 224 423

they pursue and kill deer or caribou on any fur area. In some instances, another may kill and take the meat of a beaver, provided only that he give the pelt to the man having exclusive rights to the furs within the territory in question.

Two basically different concepts of rights to resources within the same area co-exist, each justifiable and explainable in its own way: the right to hunt large game for subsistence purposes practically anywhere and the right to monopolize fur-bearing animals within prescribed areas. In British Columbia the provincial government recognized these differences some years ago and registered family owned trapping territories of the Carrier Indians and protected them by law while permitting moose-hunting anywhere.

Mo

This end product of acculturation is substantially Leacock's third stage. The nuclear family now becomes the primary economic and social unit, and the old bonds of inter-familial economic dependency become attenuated. The new individualism has even penetrated the nuclear family. Among the Western Montagnais, the sum of a trapper owns the beaver lodges which he discovers, whereas among the most acculturated of the Eastern group, only the family head may own such a resource.

Mo 177 224 423

With the breakdown in interfamilial ties among the Northeastern Algonkians, the economic centers of gravity for the families are the trading posts. Leacock says:

> "The movement of trading posts has obviously been the most important factor determining recent shifts in the size and location of Montagnais bands. However, it would be wrong to infer from this that increasing dependence on trade has acted to destroy formerly stable social groups. The reverse seems to be closer to the truth--that the changes brought about by the fur trade have led to more stable bands with greater formal organization". [Ibid., p. 38]

Mo 177 439 621 583

Leacock gives the Seven Islands band as an example of this post-contact development. This new "band", however, is of a different order entirely than aboriginal hunting bands, for the principal bond between the members is that they all trade at the Seven Islands trading post. They claim no band territory; in fact, all present trends are towards familial tracts and not band lands. The members band has a chief whose principal function is to act as intermediary with the Indian Agent. Also, the Indians refer to themselves as the "Seven Islands" (derived from the name of the trading post) people, and are so called by other Indians. In the interest of taxonomic clarity it is best not to describe such an arrangement as a "band". Such a group is reminiscent of the post-white Shoshonean of the Great Basin, who classify themselves principally by reservation, for example, Wara Springs Paiute, Burns Paiute, Owyhee Shoshoni, and so forth. Prior to the Reorganization Act, the only basis for these groupings was common residence on a reservation and representation by a spokesman, who generally attained his position partly through prestige, but probably more importantly through recognition by the Indian Agent. Since the agents preferred "cooperative" men, the chiefs often did not truly represent the Indians. These reservation people, like Leacock's Seven Islands band, had little formal structure and a very limited leader sphere. The stability of these groups is almost entirely a function of their linkage to the whites, an outside factor. Among the more acculturated Eastern Montagnais, the basic socio-economic unit appears to be the nuclear family.

III. The Montagnais

Mo 121 123

We shall discuss the Montagnais in somewhat greater detail than the Algonkians not only because they are less known ethnographically but because the special

8: Murphy & Steward E-5 (1952-1953) 1956
SQ13 Mundurucu SQ13
Montagnais NH6

problem of acculturation toward individual families has not been adequately described for South America.

The Mundurucú have been in active contact with European civilization for the last 160 years, of which only 80 years have been spent in rubber exploitation. The following description of the pre-rubber period Mundurucú does not purport to depict the pre-contact, or aboriginal, Mundurucú, but refers to the middle of the nineteenth century. Earlier changes in Mundurucú culture form the subject of another paper [Murphy 1955].

The Mundurucú have inhabited the gallery forests and savannah lands east of the upper Tapajós River in the state of Pará, Brazil, for at least two centuries. The savannah in this region is quite limited, and the predominant flora are the high forest and thick vegetation typical of the Amazon basin. The Mundurucú chose the open country for their villages because remoteness from the larger streams afforded some protection from river-born enemy attack and relief from the swarms of insects which infest the river banks, while the absence of forests immediately adjoining the villages gave some security against the dawn surprise attacks favored by nearly all tribes of the region. These attacks were difficult to launch without cover. Since the Mundurucú used water transportation only slightly, isolation from the rivers was not a hardship.

It has been noted that the nineteenth century Mundurucú and Northeastern Algonkians were on the same level of sociocultural integration. The simple, loosely-structured nomadic hunting bands of the Algonkians were roughly equivalent to the semi-sedentary villages of the Mundurucú. In both instances, the local group consisted of a multi-family, autonomous community. Under certain circumstances, the various Mundurucú villages tended to integrate on a tribal level, but there were no permanent trans-village political controls. That no Mundurucú village could function in isolation, since there was inter-village marriage and periodic cooperation in warfare and ceremonialism, does not necessarily imply a higher level of integration in economic or political activities. Similarly, it can be argued that Northeastern Algonkian bands were autonomous but by no means isolated from other such units.

The Mundurucú and Algonkians were integrated on the same level, but their cultures differed structurally or typologically and in content. Patrilineal clans and moieties in Mundurucú society made kinship ties more extensive and pervasive. Village subsistence was based on slash-and-burn horticulture. Although the heavy work of clearing the forest was done by work groups consisting of all the village males, garden care and manioc processing were carried out by the women of the matrilocal extended family. The chief occupations of the men were hunting and warfare.

Leacock's reconstruction of the aboriginal society of the Eastern Montagnais shows the nuclear family to have had greater functional importance than among the Mundurucú. The Montagnais family was a relatively stable unit within the shifting and amorphous hunting bands, whereas the Mundurucú pattern was the converse. Each Mundurucú household was a stable unit composed of women and their female offspring. The Mundurucú had the seeming paradox of matrilocal extended families in a society of patrilineal clans and moieties. The men married into these extended families from similar units in the same village or from other villages. However, there was no need to integrate a husband into the extended matrilocal family of the household, because the focus of his activities was the men's house. All males upon reaching adolescence slept in the men's house, which was located on the western perimeter of the circle of houses composing the village. The females of each household prepared and sent food to the men's house to be eaten in a communal meal. The men's house was also the center of male work and relaxation. The most immediate economic tie of a man to his wife's house was that he brought his daily take of game there. Communal distribution of game, however, made this economically

11: Murphy E-5 (1952-1953) 1958
SQ13 Mundurucu SQ13

776 224 [756] propitiated to maintain the well-being of the community. Moreover, great care must be taken to avoid giving offense to these spirits lest they strike back at the offender. The major Mundurucú ceremonies functioned mainly to secure the benevolence of the spirit mothers, and one of the chief duties of the shaman was to make periodic offerings to them and thus insure their coöperation.

562 224 [174] This preoccupation with animal spirits reflects certain basic facts about Mundurucú culture. The society is male-oriented; women are by no means passive actors in the social structure, but the major foci of the culture were male values and activities. And to the Mundurucú men, at least those of the remaining savannah villages, few activities are more important than the hunt. The male self-image is that of the warrior and hunter, the wayfarer of the forests,[5] and the Mundurucú are intensely concerned with all things arboreal. Hunting was as important as horticulture in the traditional subsistence economy and may well have been more basic to the diet in earlier times. There is some speculation about a more southerly origin of the Mundurucú,[6] which suggests the corollary hypothesis that horticulture was less important in their former habitat. If this were true, it would help to explain why hunting is so heavily emphasized in Mundurucú religion, and horticulture is almost completely secularized.

776 224 756 The mother of the game, or *putcha ïi*,[7] protects the animal kingdom as a whole from human offense. The relation between the *putcha ïi* and animals is conceived by the Mundurucú to be a mother-child relationship. It is believed to be a single, unitary spirit, but it can be found in several places and under several guises at one and the same time. Expressed differently, the *putcha ïi* is a single power having several manifestations.

The mother of the game is not an anthropomorphic personage; it has no form nor does it exist as a mobile and independent entity. Characteristically, the *putcha ïi* is found in two forms; in one it is a very special stone called a *wirakuá*, and in the other it travels in the bodies of the land tortoise and the coatá monkey. The Mundurucú *wirakuá* concept, as many of their beliefs, is not highly conceptualized or rigidly formalized. It is vaguely conceived as a power and is described as a stonelike object visible only to shamans. Thus, the mother of the game and the *wirakuá* are not identical, but the spirit does manifest itself in the latter object. In its *wirakuá* guise, the *putcha ïi* is usually found in the deep perennial springs at the headwaters of the streams that issue from the hills of the Mundurucú country. Hunting is invariably good in these locales because of the desire of the game to congregate about their mother, and Mundurucú shamans have techniques whereby they can place the *putcha ïi* in springs near their villages. So placed, the *putcha ïi* will remain indefinitely unless stolen by a shaman of another village. When the *putcha ïi* is moved by a shaman, it emits

[5] See the myth of Purisnat on pp. 197–201 for the expression of this theme in legendary form.
[6] Cf. Martius, 1867, p. 396 and Strömer, 1932, p. 2.
[7] Mundurucú words are italicized throughout the text. The system of phonetic transcription and a complete glossary of all Mundurucú terms used may be found in Appendix A. Portuguese words are not italicized, but Appendix B contains the translations of all terms mentioned and the taxonomic classifications of most flora and fauna for which Portuguese designations have been given.

[128]

12: Murphy E-5 (1952-1953) 1960
SQ13 Mundurucu SQ13

PREFACE

121 tracted my attention as a research possibility because the tribe had become differentiated into two distinct groups, one characterized by adherence to traditional ways and the other drastically modified. Since I was studying problems of social and economic change, I felt that the Mundurucú presented an opportunity for a "controlled comparison," to use Dr. Fred Eggan's words, between the two sections. I phrased my research proposals in these terms and carried out my intent in the field. Of our thirteen months in Brazil, from May, 1952, to June, 1953, we spent about five months each in a conservative village and in a more "modern" one.

This book does not present a general ethnography of Mundurucú culture; it is rather an analysis of economy and social structure, and their changes. The study of social relations in space and in time inevitably involves the-
●128 ory. I have not attempted to keep "theory" and "fact" rigidly compartmentalized, for facts are meaningless outside a frame of reference and theories are equally devoid of content unless based on substantive data. This is especially true in the present study, as some data appear incomprehensible until their proper position is seen in the light of theoretical assumptions.

122 The field trip was supported by the William Bayard Cutting Traveling Fellowship, administered by Columbia University, and by a Research Training Fellowship awarded by the Social Science Research Council. Much of the writing of the book was done in 1957 with the support of a Faculty Summer Fellowship given by the University of California. Funds awarded by the Research Committee and the Institute of International Relations at the University of California made possible research assistance and typing. Mrs. Janet Seibert prepared the manuscript and was a continual source of help and encouragement.

12; Murphy E-5 (1952-1953) 1960
SQ13 Mundurucu SQ13
Brazilian Indians SL4

B M 182 563 177

incorporation in Brazilian society. They have acquired a limited but adequate body of common understandings with their Brazilian neighbors, and their social structures have become accommodated to their relations with the whites. Straddling two worlds, their positions are not stable, and they push themselves and are pulled from the outside into closer relations with Brazilian society. The "pull" arises from the chronic demand for cheap labor in the Amazon; the "push" is a product of the native's increasing desire for manufactured possessions, coupled with disturbances in his society which resulted from this acquisitiveness. The outcome of the process is the disappearance of traditional Indian social systems. But the affected Indians are not left in a social limbo. Rather, they shift their principal bonds of dependency to their already existent relations with the whites and move into the general orbit of caboclo society.

B M 177 182

An understanding of the process by which native societies of the Amazon have become economically and socially dependent on the white man, and of the effects of this dependence, are central to an understanding of the transition from Indian to caboclo. Other aspects of the native culture are secondary in importance; the Indian, once incorporated, has ample opportunity to learn the white man's ways. Or, if he is disinclined or unsuccessful in this respect, his children, who have been reared outside the traditional social matrix, certainly will become linguistically and culturally as much, or more, Brazilian than Indian.

These remarks are also pertinent beyond the Amazon valley. The final chapter of this book will consider the general relevance of Mundurucú social and economic change to an understanding of the broader problems of culture change.

M [128]●

[Text continues on page 7]

12:Murphy E-5 (1952-1953) 1960
SQ13 Mundurucu SQ13

121 to know how the parts of the system are related to one another and to the totality. It is also necessary to understand how the system becomes a coherent and integrated set of social relationships in terms of observable behavior. I attempt to do this in the present work. A functional analysis of social structure has another important value, and one that is not fully utilized by anthropologists. Since a basic assumption of the method is that a system has internal coherence, it is possible to see clues to the past in items that do not fit into the present. This, of course, is reminiscent of the now unpopular use of "survivals" for purposes of historical reconstruction. I do not think, however, that I have engaged in a form of "conjectural" history. Rather, I have attempted to relate my clues, the nonfunctional and disfunctional items of the present, to the probable structure of Mundurucú society as it existed in the past. And I have attempted to marshal as much historical and ethnographic data as possible to validate my reconstructions. In this way, I have avoided speculations based on one or another shred of data and have remained within the framework of structural analysis. And, it might be added, I have thus tried to bring my historical material under the canons of internal criticism of historical data.

178 Economy and social structure have changed a great deal during the past century and a half of Mundurucú history, making the tribe an especially good subject for this type of study. I have relied to a certain extent on older informants for data of past conditions. The memories of the old people are variable in accuracy, richness, and content, and I tried where possible to corroborate points with a number of informants. It would, however, be naïve to assume that material obtained from an old informant, however well corroborated, is valid for the "aboriginal," or pre-contact, period. A sixty-year-old man—of whom there are

124
128

12: Murphy E-5 (1952-1953) 1960
SQ13 Mundurucu SQ13

very few among the Mundurucú—interviewed in 1952 was born in 1892. Since his most reliable recollections probably date from his adolescence, his memories of things seen and heard will be of value only for the time after about 1905—and I am being generous here. The period of 1905 and shortly thereafter is within the last decade of the rubber boom and is well over a century after the first contact between Mundurucú and whites. In short, it has been necessary to exercise great caution with these data.

A good deal of the data from informants were datable, within broad limits, by their context. Thus, when I heard that a duty of the chief in times past was to "buy goods for the people," I knew that I was not faced with the pristine. And, fortunately, there is some highly useful documentary history on the Mundurucú. One does not get a smooth historical continuum replete with detail, but it is possible to discern in the written records some of the large-scale changes that have taken place in the society. I have avoided the method, common in acculturation studies, of working with two cultural base lines, the aboriginal and the present, and comparing the two. This procedure may have some value when the transfer of items of culture from one society to another through diffusion is studied, but it does not lend itself to the analysis of the continual interplay of the forces of stability and change acting on a social system.

The Mundurucú present advantages for the student of social change. It has been said that there are three socially and culturally distinct Mundurucú populations, which differ in degree of change—a differentiation that took place only during the past twenty-five years as a result of migration. This study does not include the population of the Tapajós River, where Mundurucú society is most drastically changed, but concentrates on the people of the savan-

12: Murphy E-5 (1952-1953) 1960
SQ13 Mundurucu SQ13

121 nahs and the Cururú River. The differences between the
184 savannah villages and those of the Cururú, and between the modes of social life of the two groups in general, are profound, and I believe that they can be traced to the degree of participation in trade and the rubber-extraction industry. A comparison of the two groups is rewarding because it reveals two points of Mundurucú history. And since the savannah villages will probably be abandoned in a generation or two, and their residents will move also to the banks of the larger streams, a comparison also gives a glimpse of the future. Beyond these considerations, an element of control over the data is introduced. Processes of change that may be surmised to be at work in the savannah communities may be seen to have run their course on the Cururú. Conversely, we need not speculate on the antecedents of social structure on the Cururú River, for we see them on the savannahs.

• 128 I start my analysis with a presentation of Mundurucú
[127] history, based on published sources and information given by the priests of the Cururú mission. The next four chapters, the main body of the book, present general material on traditional Mundurucú culture and social structure in the savannah communities. The last of these four chapters, chapter 6, discusses the contemporary bases of social integration, and the centrifugal tendencies in Mundurucú society. This is also the logical place to discuss relations with the whites. Chapter 7 shifts attention to the Cururú River villages and analyzes the progressive disorganization of Mundurucú society there. The final chapter summarizes the findings on social change and discusses their implications for general anthropological theory.